

WILLINGHAM  
BUCKINGHAM  
LEIALOHA

# FAB LES

# 72

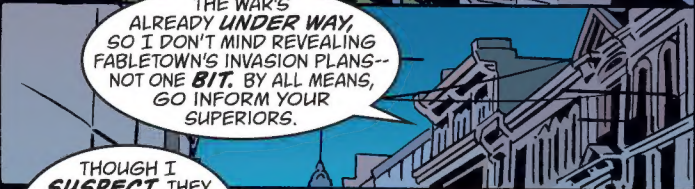
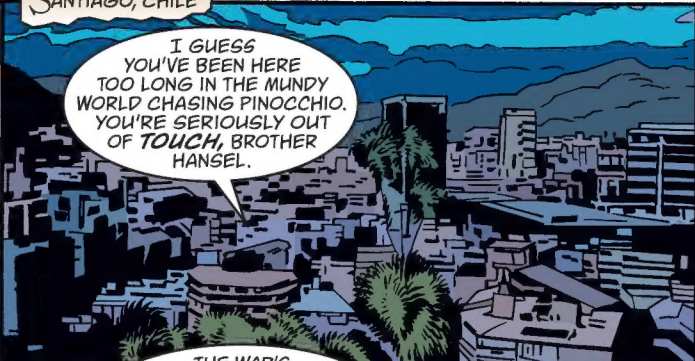


SANTIAGO, CHILE

I GUESS YOU'VE BEEN HERE TOO LONG IN THE MUNDY WORLD CHASING PINOCCHIO. YOU'RE SERIOUSLY OUT OF TOUCH, BROTHER HANSEL.

THE WAR'S ALREADY UNDER WAY, SO I DON'T MIND REVEALING FABLETOWN'S INVASION PLANS-- NOT ONE BIT. BY ALL MEANS, GO INFORM YOUR SUPERIORS.

THOUGH I SUSPECT THEY MIGHT HAVE ALREADY FIGURED IT OUT FOR THEMSELVES, FROM ALL OF THE SUDDEN SHOOTING AND BOMBING.



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# SKULDUGGERY Part Two of Two



WAIT! HERE'S SOMETHING THEY PROBABLY DON'T KNOW YET! WE'RE CALLING THE INVASION "OPERATION THUNDERCLOUD."

DOES THAT HELP?

NOT MUCH.

OKAY, THAT LAST PART WAS A LIE-- MY FIRST LIE ALL EVENING. THE REAL NAME FOR THE INVASION IS "OPERATION JACK KETCH."




I'VE HEARD ENOUGH. WE'RE LEAVING.

KERR, BRING THE BOY WITH US.

BUT I KEPT THAT MUM BECAUSE THE NAME ACTUALLY CONTAINS A CLUE WITHIN IT OF OUR LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLANS.


I TRIED TO ARGUE AGAINST IT. HONESTLY, I DID.



ALBEN, WAIT FIFTEEN MINUTES FOR US TO GET CLEAR AND THEN EXECUTE THE WOMAN.

WAIT THE FULL TIME SINCE WE CAN'T CHANCE THE LOCAL POLICE ARRIVING TO DISCOVER ALL OF US STILL IN THE AREA WITH A TRUSSED-UP BOY IN OUR POSSESSION.

YES, SIR.



AND YOU, YOUNG LADY, I SUGGEST YOU MAKE GOOD USE OF THE TIME TO PRAY FOR YOUR IMMORTAL SOUL.

ONE SHOULD ALWAYS NAME MILITARY AND CLANDESTINE MISSIONS RANDOMLY, TO AVOID EVEN THE SLIGHTEST POSSIBILITY OF REVEALING INTENTIONS TO THE ENEMY.

BUT FABLETOWN IS RUN BY ANACHRONISTIC MEN WHO CLING TO ROMANTIC NOTIONS OF WAR. THEY COULDN'T *RESIST* THE POETIC TITLE.



YOU'VE SERVED AN UGLY AND *SINFUL* CAUSE FOR SO LONG, YOU'LL NEED TO SUMMON UP *ALL* OF YOUR REGRETS AND HUMILITY TO ENTER ONCE MORE INTO A STATE OF GRACE.

GOOD ADVICE. GOT A SPARE BIBLE?



I'M AFRAID I CAN'T ALLOW THAT. OUR DOSSIER ON YOU SUGGESTS THAT *ANYTHING* IN YOUR HANDS CAN POTENTIALLY BE USED AS A WEAPON.

GOD SAVE US FROM *AMATEURS*-- THE ONES ON MY SIDE MOST OF ALL.

BUT THE BOYS IN CHARGE DIDN'T LISTEN. THIS ISN'T EXACTLY *NEWS*. AFTER ALL, I'M JUST A GIRL--A PRETTY BLONDE ONE AT THAT.




AND THE BIBLE, AFTER ALL, IS CALLED THE SWORD OF GOD. WHY ARM SUCH A FORMIDABLE FOE WITH A SWORD, HMMM?

YES, THAT'S RATHER AN *AMUSING* JAPE, HMMM?




YEAH, YOU'RE *QUITE* THE WIT. I'M LITERALLY CRACKING UP.


ALBEN, MAKE SURE SHE SITS HERE THE ENTIRE TIME, AND DON'T LET HER *TOUCH* ANYTHING.




IF THEY'D THOUGHT IT THROUGH, THOUGH, THEY MIGHT HAVE REALIZED I'M THE BEST SECRET AGENT WHO'S EVER LIVED. NO, I'M NOT BRAGGING; IT'S THE COLD, RATIONAL **TRUTH**.



I'M BETTER THAN ANY HOMELAND'S SPY BECAUSE I'VE HAD ACCESS TO BOTH MAGIC AND ALL OF THE MUNDY ADVANCEMENTS IN ESPIONAGE OVER THE YEARS--TECHNOLOGY AND THEORY.



AND I'M BETTER THAN ANY MUNDY SPY BECAUSE THE BEST SPY THEY'VE EVER PRODUCED HAS ONLY HAD **LESS** THAN A SINGLE HUMAN LIFETIME TO PERFECT HIS TRADECRAFT.



BUT I'VE BEEN PERFECTING MINE FOR MOST OF TWO CENTURIES--EVER SINCE BIGBY RECRUITED ME, WHEN I FIRST ARRIVED IN THE MUNDY WORLD.



YOU'LL HAVE TO ASK HIM WHAT HE SAW IN ME THAT MADE HIM BELIEVE I'D BE GOOD FOR THIS SORT OF WORK.

I'M ALSO ONE OF THIS WORLD'S MOST ACCOMPLISHED EXPERTS IN UNARMED COMBAT, THE SAME PRINCIPLE APPLYING.

THE CLOCK HAS STARTED, MA'AM. IF YOU PLAN TO FOLLOW GENERAL HANSEL'S ADVICE AND PRAY, I **SUGGEST** YOU BEGIN SOON.



ACTUALLY, I WAS THINKING OF SQUIRMING AND WRITHING IN MY SEAT WHILE MAKING SEXUALLY CHARGED MOANING, COOING AND **PURRING** SOUNDS.



ALL OF THAT BEING A PRELUDE TO OFFERING YOU WILD, **ANIMAL** SEX, AS A DISTRACTION THAT MIGHT GIVE ME THE CHANCE TO GET THAT GREASE GUN AND **BLUDGEON** YOU WITH IT.

MADAM! WHERE'S YOUR CHRISTIAN **MODESTY**?

THINK OF THE GREATEST MARTIAL ARTS SENSEI IN HUMAN HISTORY AND REALIZE ONCE AGAIN THAT HE'S ONLY HAD A **SINGLE** HUMAN LIFETIME TO PERFECT HIS ARTS.

I'VE DEVOTED AT LEAST THREE HUMAN LIFETIMES TO LEARNING EVERY POSSIBLE WAY TO DISABLE, MAIM OR KILL A MAN.

SQUANDERED LONG AGO, BUDDY.

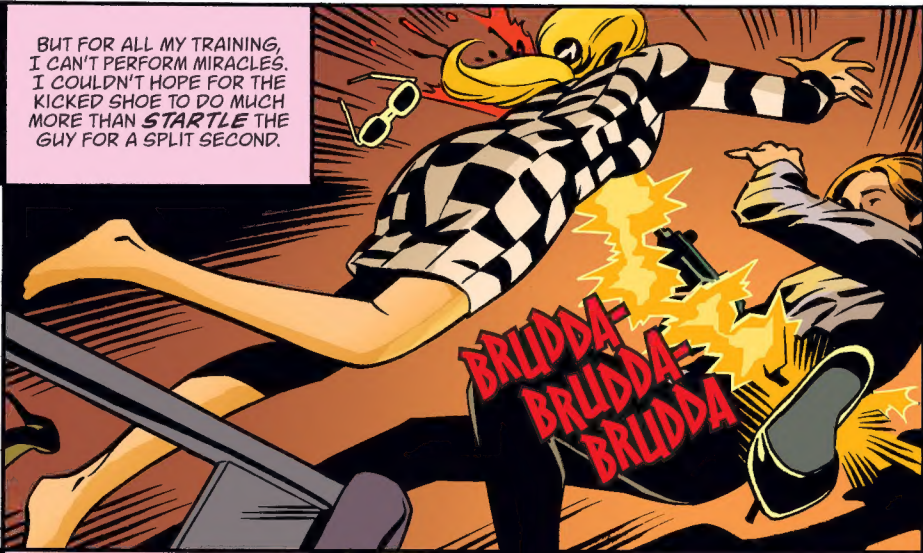


HERE!



YURF!

BUT FOR ALL MY TRAINING, I CAN'T PERFORM MIRACLES. I COULDN'T HOPE FOR THE KICKED SHOE TO DO MUCH MORE THAN **STARTLE** THE GUY FOR A SPLIT SECOND.



AND THERE WAS AN AWFUL LONG STRETCH OF FLOOR TO CROSS. PLENTY OF TIME FOR THE BURP GUN TO NAIL ME AT LEAST TWICE BEFORE I COULD CLOSE WITH HIM.



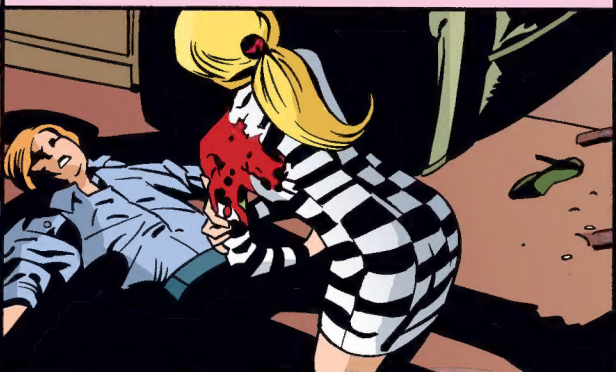
THE OUTCOME OF THIS STRUGGLE IS FAR FROM CERTAIN. I'M WOUNDED AND ALBEN IS FIGHTING FOR HIS LIFE.



THANKFULLY IT'S ANOTHER WHITE HAT DAY. THE GOOD GUY WINS--MO!--AND THE BAD GUY LOSES.

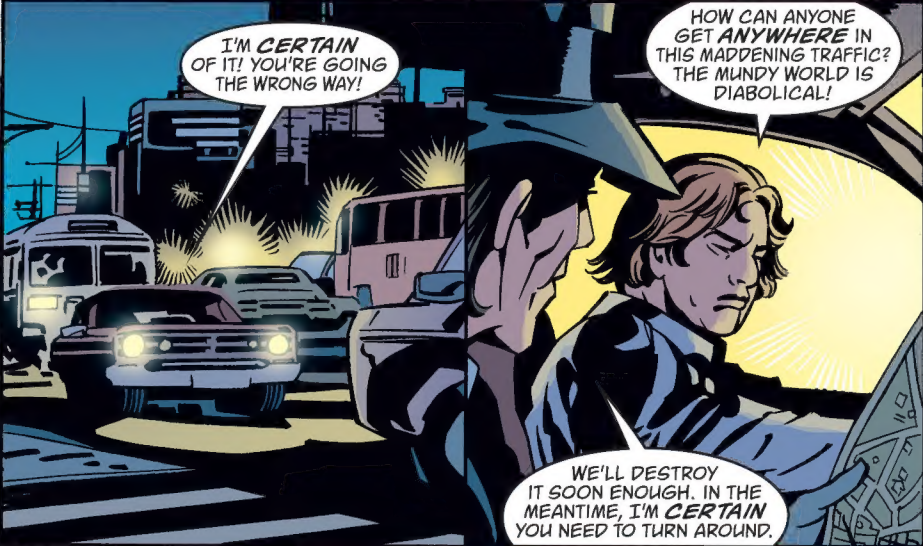
BULLETS SEEMED TO'VE MISSED MY HEART, OR ANY OTHER VITAL SPOT, BUT I'M BLEEDING LIKE A STUCK PIG.

HAVE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT BEFORE HOMING IN ON PINOCCHIO AGAIN.

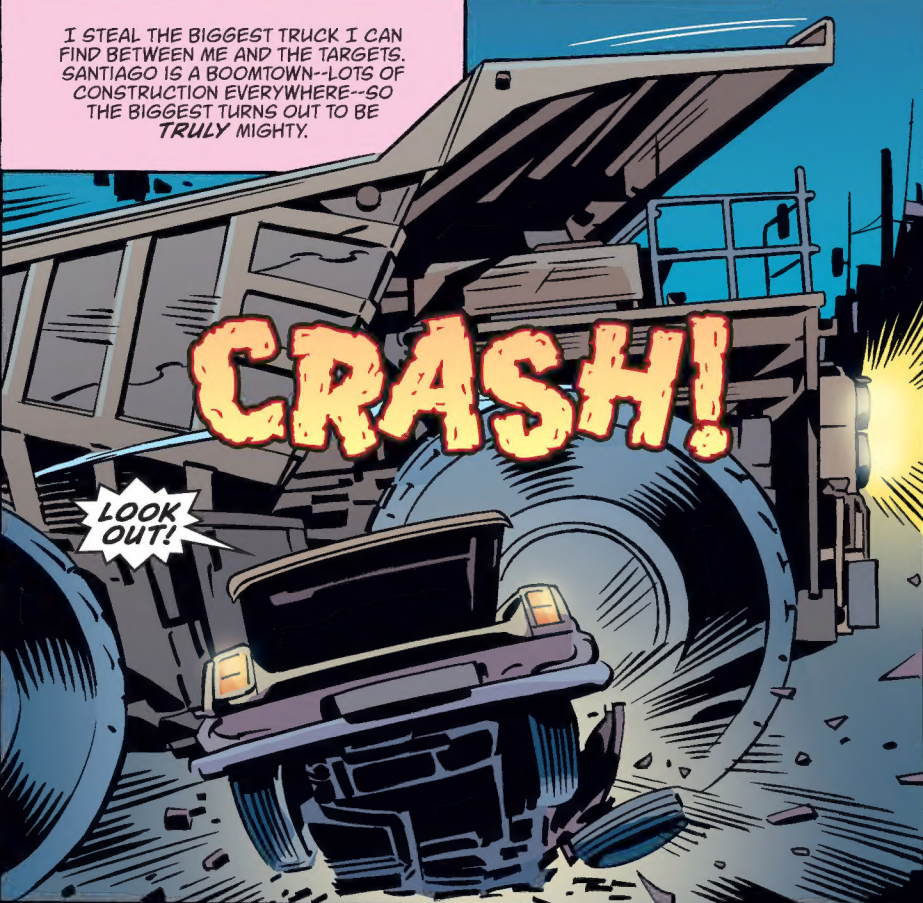


I SPEND A FEW PRECIOUS MINUTES IMPROVISING BANDAGES, WHILE HANSEL AND HIS GOON GET FARTHER AND FARTHER AWAY WITH THE PACKAGE.

BUT THE BUMP OF DIRECTION, CONNECTING ME TO PINOCCHIO, IS STILL OPERATING. I CAN STILL PULL THIS OFF--MAYBE.

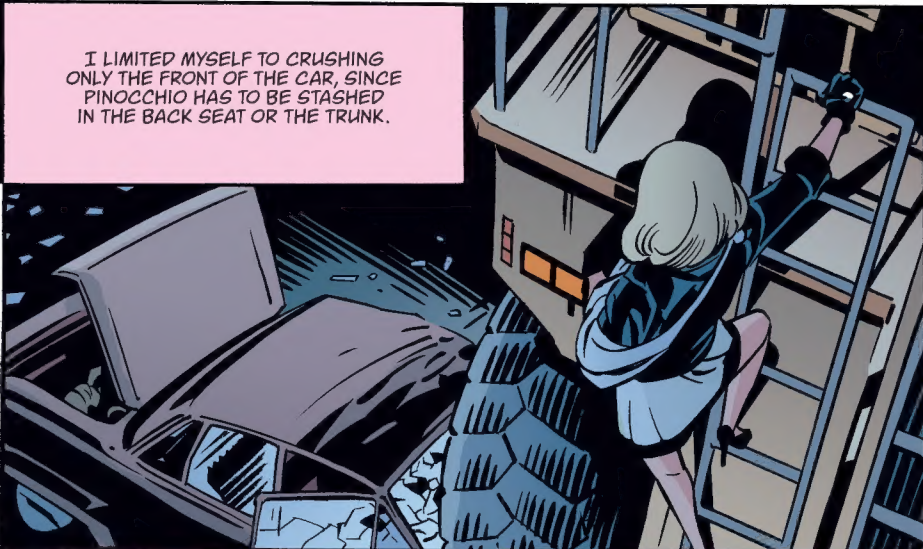


I STEAL THE BIGGEST TRUCK I CAN FIND BETWEEN ME AND THE TARGETS. SANTIAGO IS A BOOMTOWN--LOTS OF CONSTRUCTION EVERYWHERE--SO THE BIGGEST TURNS OUT TO BE TRULY MIGHTY.





I LIMITED MYSELF TO CRUSHING ONLY THE FRONT OF THE CAR, SINCE PINOCCHIO HAS TO BE STASHED IN THE BACK SEAT OR THE TRUNK.



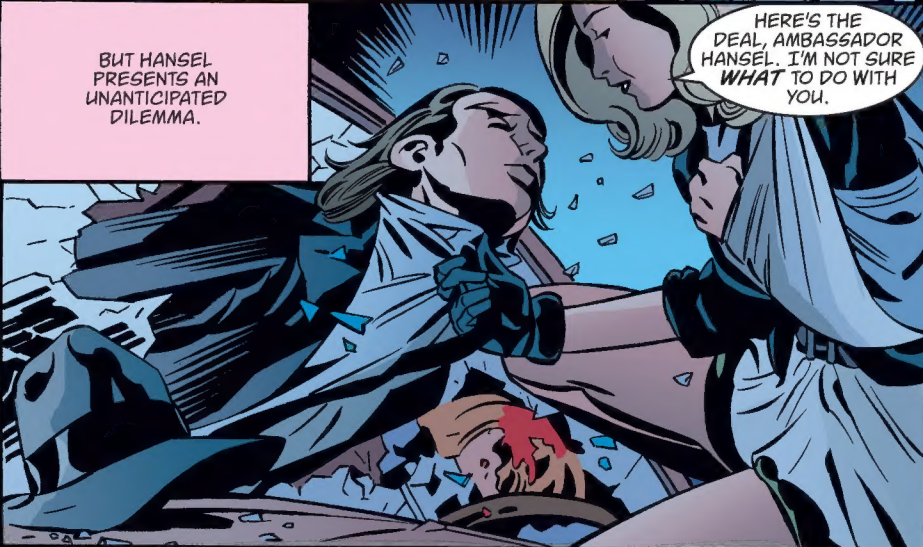
FIRST THINGS FIRST. I EXECUTE THE DRIVER.



KERR WASN'T A POPULAR FABLE, SO HE SHOULD STAY DEAD.



BUT HANSEL PRESENTS AN UNANTICIPATED DILEMMA.



HERE'S THE DEAL, AMBASSADOR HANSEL. I'M NOT SURE **WHAT** TO DO WITH YOU.

I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE STILL CONSIDERED THE EMPIRE ENVOY TO FABLETOWN, WHICH MEANS I CAN'T **OUTRIGHT** KILL YOU.

BUT I CAN'T LEAVE LIVE ENEMIES BEHIND--SO I GUESS WE'LL HAVE TO **COMPROMISE**.

LACK OF KNEECAPS SHOULD SLOW YOU DOWN ENOUGH FOR MY PURPOSES.

**BLAM!**

**AARRRRII-IUUGH!!**

*BOTH* KNEECAPS. SORRY IF THAT SEEMS OVERLY CRUEL, BUT THE SUCCESS OF MY MISSION IS MY ONLY GOVERNING CONCERN.

**BLAM!**

**URRCKKK!**

PINOCCHIO WAS IN THE TRUNK AND SURVIVED THE CRASH JUST FINE. I KNEW HE WOULD. HIS POPULARITY AMONG THE MUNDYS MAKES HIM ONE **TOUGH** LITTLE BRAT.

READY TO GET OUT OF HERE?

YES, PLEASE.

PINOCCHIO AND I WERE ABLE TO CATCH THE CLANDESTINE FLIGHT I'D ARRANGED, WITHOUT FURTHER INCIDENT. NEXT STOP...

NEW YORK CITY

RODNEY, WAKE UP!



RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER FROM FABLETOWN...



I THOUGHT WE WERE HOME FREE. SILLY ME. IT TURNS OUT THE ADVERSARY HAD AGENTS IN PLACE RIGHT NEXT TO FABLETOWN.

HUH?

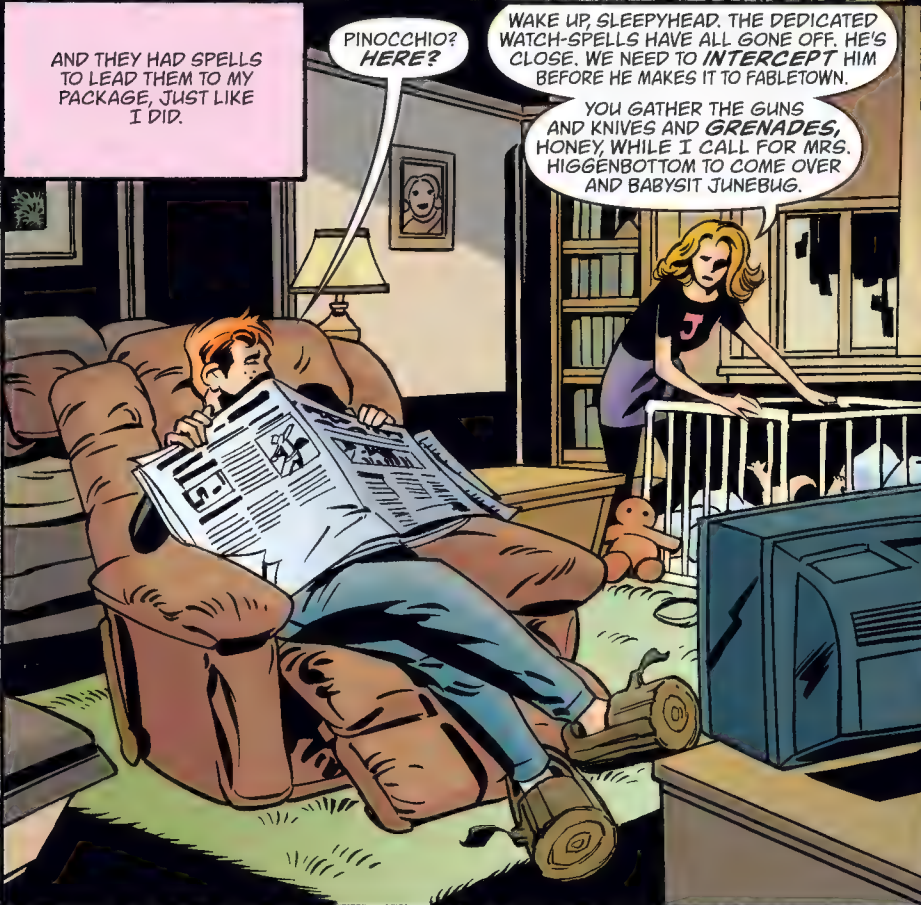
PINOCCHIO'S IN THE CITY!

AND THEY HAD SPELLS TO LEAD THEM TO MY PACKAGE, JUST LIKE I DID.

PINOCCHIO? HERE?

WAKE UP, SLEEPYHEAD. THE DEDICATED WATCH-SPILLS HAVE ALL GONE OFF. HE'S CLOSE. WE NEED TO INTERCEPT HIM BEFORE HE MAKES IT TO FABLETOWN.

YOU GATHER THE GUNS AND KNIVES AND GRENADES, HONEY, WHILE I CALL FOR MRS. HIGGENBOTTOM TO COME OVER AND BABYSIT JUNEBUG.



ACTUALLY THEIR SPELLS TURNED OUT TO BE BETTER THAN MINE, SINCE THEY DIDN'T HAVE TO NEGOTIATE WITH FRAU TOTENKINDER FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL ENCHANTMENT.

HEADS UP, SWEETIE. I CAN FEEL IT. WE'RE GETTING CLOSE.



SLOW DOWN. IT'S GOING TO BE ONE OF THOSE CARS COMING UP.

YES, DEAR.



THERE!

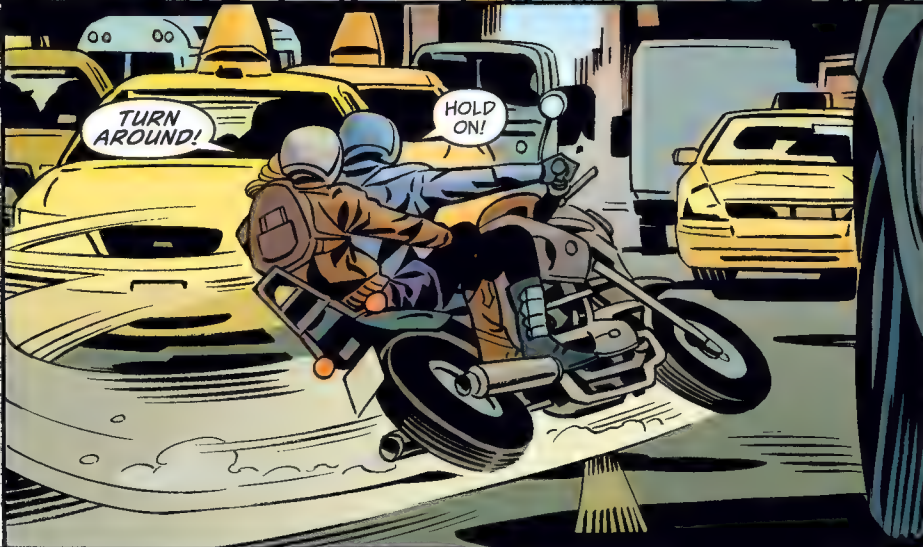
THAT'S THE ONE!

THEY'RE IN THAT YELLOW CAB!



TURN AROUND!

HOLD ON!



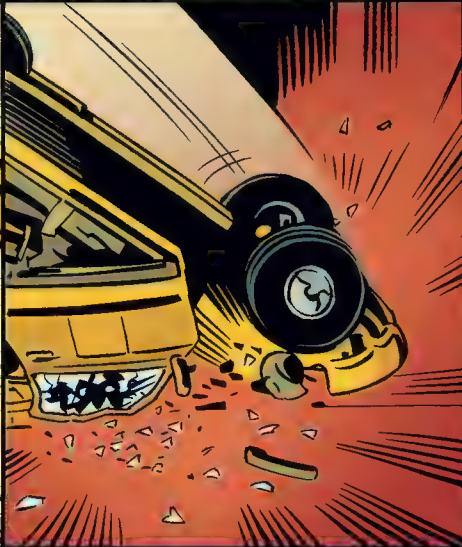
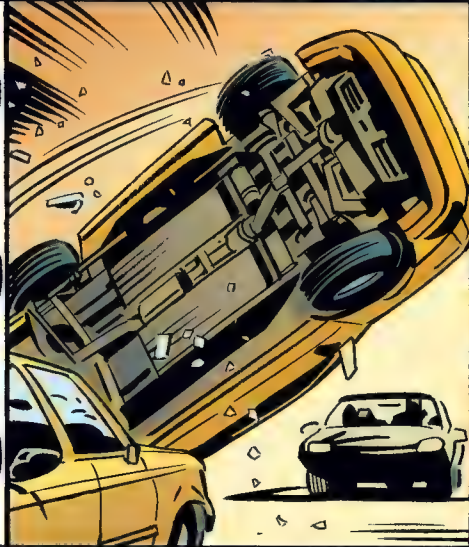
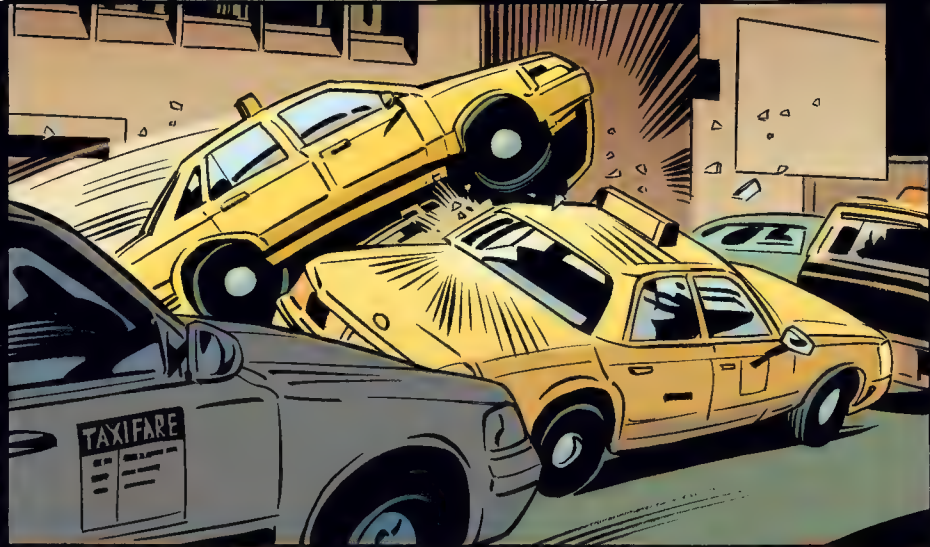


DAMN IT!  
DAMN IT!



WE WERE SO CLOSE!  
JUST EIGHT BLOCKS  
FROM FABLETOWN!





SO DAMNED CLOSE.

THEN, IF YOU'RE STILL IN ONE PIECE, TRY TO PULL YOURSELF OUT.

MAKE A RUN FOR FABLETOWN, WHILE I SEE WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST THIS TIME, AND TRY TO HOLD THEM OFF.

ARE YOU STILL ALIVE, KID?

I... THINK SO.

THAT'S CINDERELLA. I RECOGNIZE HER FROM OUR SURVEILLANCE PHOTOS. SHE'S SUPPOSED TO BE DEADLY.

NOT SO MUCH NOW. SHE LOOKS PRETTY BEAT UP.

BEAT UP ENOUGH TO LET HER LIVE?

UNFORTUNATELY NOT. OUR INSTRUCTIONS IN JUST SUCH AN INSTANCE ARE *UNEQUIVOCAL*. WE KILL HER AND TAKE THE BOY.

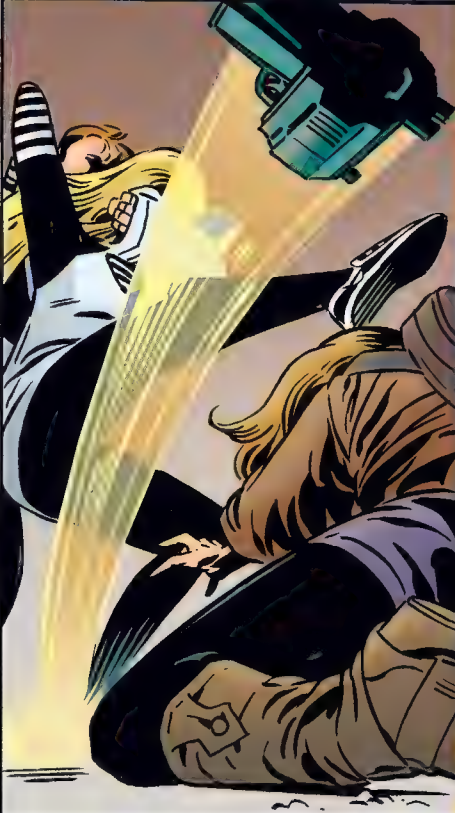
SORRY, MISS. WE TAKE NO JOY IN THIS.

I'M WELL AND TRULY BEAT ALL TO SHIT, BUT THESE TWO KILLERS LEFT ME ONE POSSIBLE WAY OUT. THEY CAME TOO CLOSE TO TAKE THEIR SHOTS.

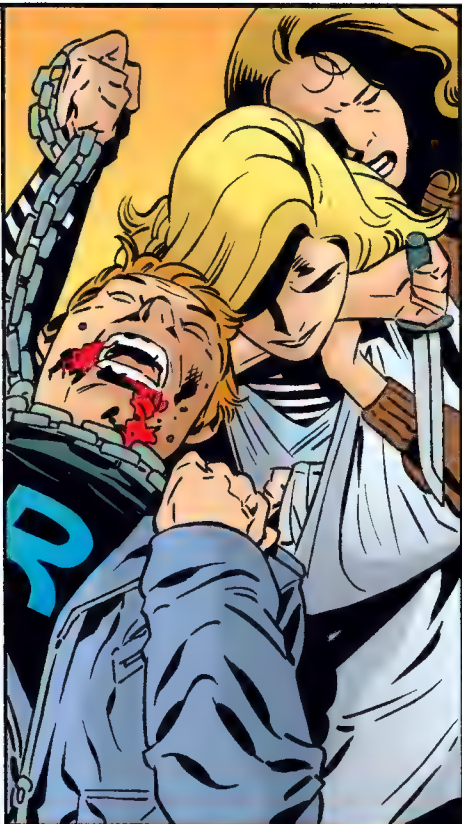
WHEN ARE PEOPLE GOING TO *LEARN*? GUNS ARE RANGED WEAPONS.





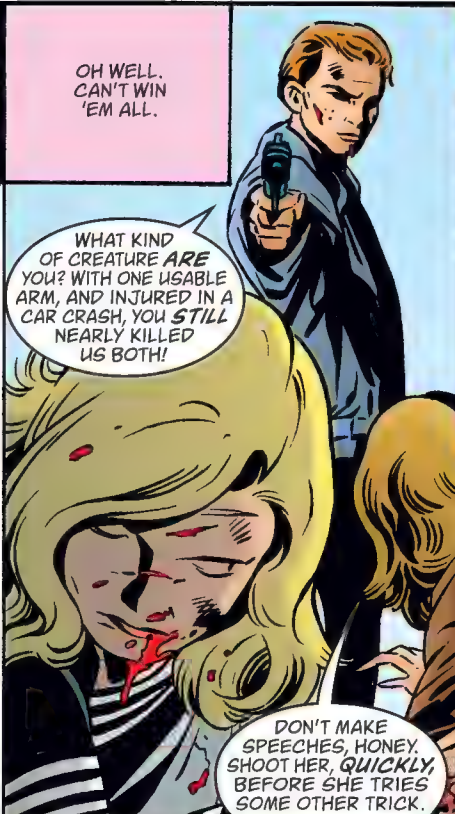

















OH WELL.  
CAN'T WIN  
'EM ALL.














WHAT KIND  
OF CREATURE **ARE**  
YOU? WITH ONE USABLE  
ARM, AND INJURED IN A  
CAR CRASH, YOU **STILL**  
NEARLY KILLED  
US BOTH!

DON'T MAKE  
SPEECHES, HONEY.  
SHOOT HER, **QUICKLY**,  
BEFORE SHE TRIES  
SOME OTHER TRICK.









CINDY ISN'T THE  
ENEMY AND SHE  
DIDN'T KIDNAP ME.  
I **ARRANGED**  
THIS.

HOW?  
WHY? WHAT  
HAPPENED TO  
YOUR LOYALTY  
TO FATHER?



NO, **WAIT**,  
RODNEY!

YOU  
**DON'T** HAVE TO  
**DO** THIS!



I TOLD YOU  
TO **RUN**, YOU UNMINDFUL  
LITTLE SHIIIIIIIIII...

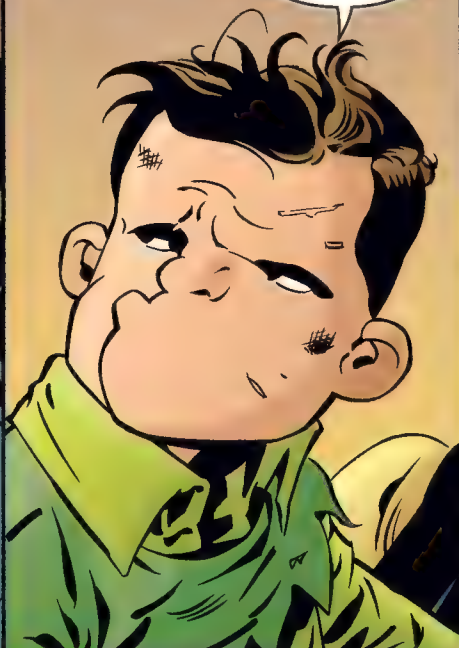
THAT'S WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT, LITTLE BROTHER! LOYALTY TO DAD! AND THAT'S WHY YOU TWO HAVE TO QUIT ACTING LIKE BADASS ASSASSIN GANGSTERS AND HELP ME GET TO FABLETOWN.

JUST LIKE ME, YOU TWO ALWAYS HAVE TO DO WHAT'S BEST FOR GEPPETTO, RIGHT?



SO THEN ASK YOURSELF--HOW AM I ABLE TO DO THIS, IF IT ISN'T IN DAD'S BEST INTEREST?

DON'T YOU SEE? DAD *SHOULDN'T* BE THE BLOODY GODDAMN EMPEROR OF A BLOODY GODDAMN EMPIRE. THAT'S WHAT GOT HIM ALL TWISTED UP!



BUT--

OUT OF OUR LOYALTY TO HIM, WE HAVE TO GET HIM FREE OF ALL THAT CRAP.

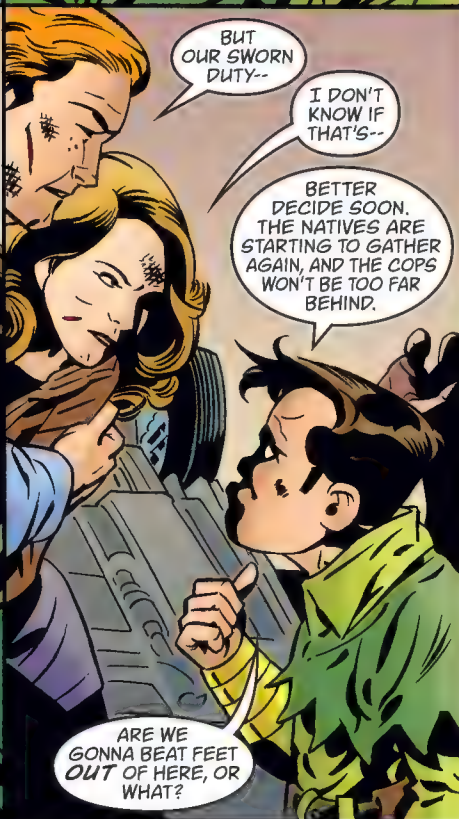


AND NOW, SINCE YOU TWO HAVE TOTALLY MURDERED THE HELL OUT OF CINDERELLA, YOU HAVE TO COMPLETE HER MISSION. IT'S THE ONLY COMPLETELY LOYAL THING TO DO.

BUT OUR SWORN DUTY--

I DON'T KNOW IF THAT'S--

BETTER DECIDE SOON. THE NATIVES ARE STARTING TO GATHER AGAIN, AND THE COPS WON'T BE TOO FAR BEHIND.



ARE WE GONNA BEAT FEET OUT OF HERE, OR WHAT?

TWENTY-SEVEN MINUTES LATER...

WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN THIS LOBBY?

WE'RE AGENTS OF THE ADVERSARY, TURNING OURSELVES OVER TO FABLETOWN AUTHORITY.

EXCEPT THAT WE'RE NOT QUITE SURRENDERING YET. I HAVE TO GO HOME AND GET JUNEBUG FIRST.

AND YOU KNOW ME, GRIMBLE. I'M BACK FROM THE HOMELANDS, SEEKING ASYLUM.

PINOCCHIO?

WELL, MOSTLY THEY'VE ALL GONE TO WAR.

SO WHO DO WE OFFICIALLY SURRENDER TO? WHERE IS EVERYBODY?



A FEW DAYS LATER IN A NEW YORK MUNDY HOSPITAL...

NO, I'M NOT DEAD YET.

IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN *THIS* TO CASH IN MY CHIPS.

WE'RE JUST SO GLAD YOU'RE OKAY.

BUT DID YOU HAVE TO GET YOURSELF SENT TO A *MUNDY* HOSPITAL?

DON'T WORRY. I'M JUST A NORMAL JANE DOE WITH TRAUMATIC *MEMORY LOSS* AFTER BEING AN UNFORTUNATE BYSTANDER IN SOME DRIVE-BY *GANG SHOOTING*.

BUT THE DOCTORS ARE BEGINNING TO GET A BIT CURIOUS AT HOW FAST I'M *MENDING*, SO THE SOONER YOU CAN BUST ME OUT OF HERE, THE BETTER.

WE'RE WORKING ON IT. JUST CONTINUE TO PLAY DUMB IN THE MEANTIME.

EASY ENOUGH FOR ME.

I MADE A LOT OF DUMB MISTAKES ON THIS ONE. HOW'S THE *BRAT* DOING?

WHO CAN SAY?

THEY WHISKED HIM UP TO WOLF MANOR FOR DEBRIEFING. THAT'S THE NEW *NERVE CENTER* OF OUR WAR PLANNING.

LEAVING BEAUTY AND ME DOWN HERE TO PRESIDE OVER AN EMPTY *FABLETOWN*. BUT *RELAX, CINDY*.

SLEEP THE SLEEP OF THE JUST, KNOWING THAT YOU COMPLETED YOUR MISSION.

I GUESS I CAN LIVE WITH THAT.

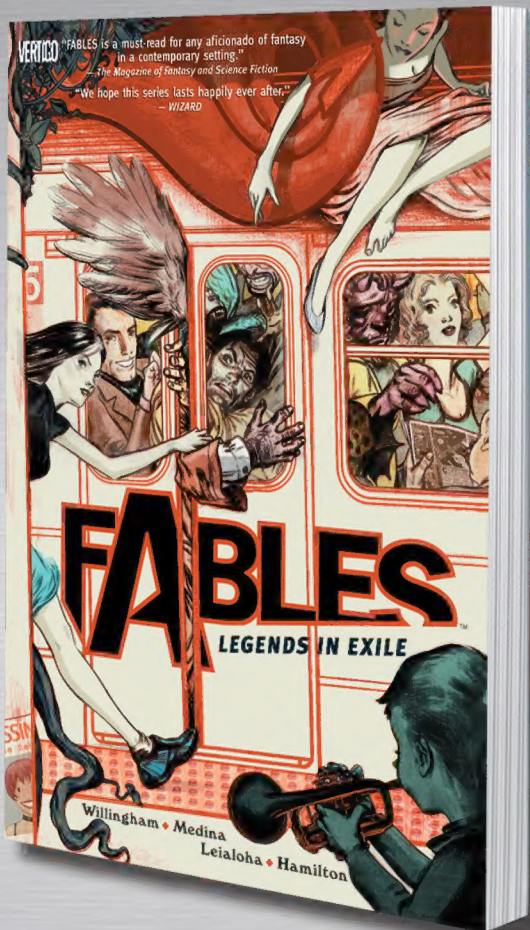
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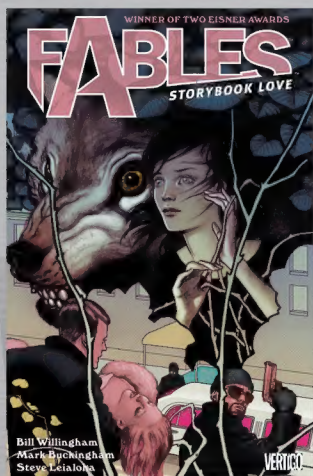
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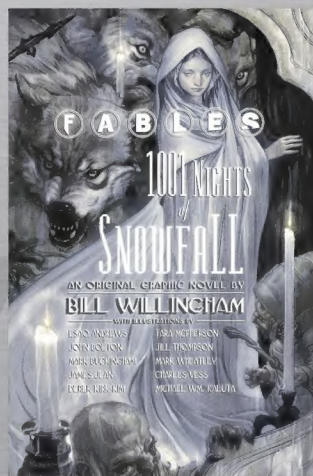
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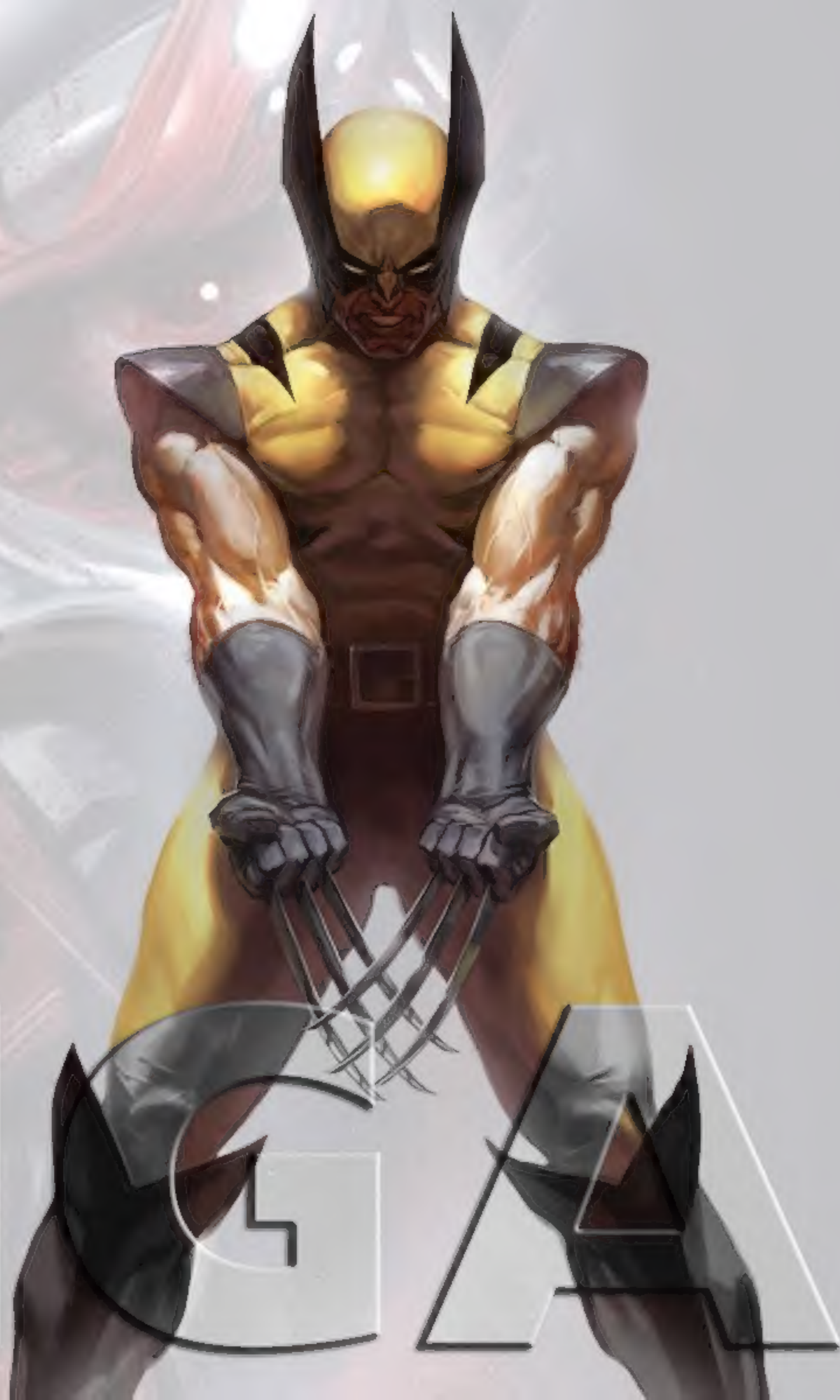
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